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SERMON ON
BISHOP CHEVERUS



SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

OF

6304
ST. PETER,

Baltimore, November 1st, 1810;

ON OCCASION OF THE CONSECRATION

OF THE ✓

RT. RD. DR. JOHN CHEVERUS,

BISHOP OF BOSTON.

BY THE

REV. W. V. HAROLD,

ONE OF THE PASTORS OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA;

AND

PRINTED AT THE REQUEST,

OF THE

R. RD. BISHOPS,

ATTENDING ON THIS SOLEMN OCCASION.

BALTIMORE :

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.....
1810.

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DISTRICT OF MARYLAND—Sct.

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PHILIP MOORE, *Clerk*
Of the District of Maryland.

SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

OF

ST. PETER,

BALTIMORE, NOVEMBER 1, 1810.

FEED the flock of God which is among you, and when the Prince of Pastors shall appear, you shall receive a never fading crown of Glory.

1 EP. OF PETER, c. 5, v. 24.

THE christian Religion presents the evidence of its Divine Origin in the spirit which it breathes, in the vast field which it embraces, in the glorious end to which it points the hope of man—peace and good will was the first message it proclaimed, happiness and eternal safety the last legacy it bequeathed to the world. Whilst it bares the arm of Almighty vengeance to affright the daring impenitence of man, it imparts confidence and fortitude to the trembling, helpless, desponding sinner, and throws open to his relief the bosom of a merciful God. In the christian Religion we discover nothing of that inefficient theory which slumbers over speculations of improvement, and coldly suggests plans of reformation. We see a living system of active, laborious legislation, carried by the necessity of its constitution, to the promotion of good, and the diffusion of happiness, drawing mercy down to the earth, lifting man up to heaven. In its divine founder we have not to contemplate the cold overweening, supercilious Philosopher, buried in the

delicious dream of fancied superiority, pointing the finger of scorn at ignorance, and looking down with contempt on that wretchedness he will not labour to remove. In him we recognize the compassionate friend of man, stretching forth his hand to the relief of our misery, labouring with indefatigable perseverance in the removal of our ignorance, feeling no other interest than that of his Father in Heaven, and his brothers on earth; and devoting himself to a life of sorrow, and a death of dishonour, that he might spread through the world the glory of the one, and lay an imperishable foundation for the welfare of the other.

To promote that great end, to extend the means of everlasting salvation to those for whom Christ Jesus poured forth his life in agony, to carry the hope and consolations of the Gospel to the remotest boundaries of our country, are the objects of this day's solemn assembly. When I contrast the prospect before me with the temper of the age in which we live—when I pass in review the thousands and tens of thousands who will stand indebted for their eternal welfare to the appointment of this day, I see ample ground for hope, for joy, for exultation. This, my Brethren, is a prospect on which every well formed mind can rest with full and undivided approbation. But when I recollect that the hand which extended this blessing to our country, is now perhaps, galled by the manacle of a captive, that the heart which felt for our spiritual necessities is bursting for his people's sufferings and his own, I seek not to suppress the feelings of humanity. A gloom overspreads this day of our joy. The scourge that is desolating Europe has fallen with peculiar severity on the first of Christian Bishops—he has added his venerable name to the countless victims

of an un pitying, murderous, ambition—he has seen his sanctuaries plundered ; he has been torn from the arms of his people, and is doomed perhaps, like his immortal predecessor, to perish in destitution and exile—but he has not merely succeeded to the spiritual primacy and apostolical pre-eminence of Peter; he has inherited the fortitude of that great apostle—he can suffer, he can die. His temporal power, his titles of perishable eminence may pass away—the better greatness of his apostleship will endure without equal, without second : his true prerogative will shine forth to the common good of Christians—it has shone forth to our advantage. The shadow of death, by which our sovereign Pontiff is encompassed, has not concealed his children from his view—the personal miseries by which he is assailed have not broken his spirit, nor weakened in his heart, his solicitude for all the Churches.—We are this day to receive, as a gracious pledge of his paternal regard, a Pastor to feed the flock of Christ ; a Bishop to rule the Church of God ; one who comes recommended to the important trust, by distinguished talent, by faithful, indefatigable exertion, by the hallowed test of a venerable life. I am to address you on an occasion alike important and interesting, interesting in its immediate effects ; important in its remotest consequences, subsidiary to the cause of virtue, good order and religion, auspicious to our happiness as men, and to our hope as Christians.

I have called the object of this day's meeting important, and I feel no cause to apprehend that any here will question the just application of that term. It is important, if the highest concerns of man deserve to be so considered.

From meetings similar to this, the light of the Gospel has been carried to the nations that sat in darkness. From meetings similar to this, virtue and civilization have gone forth, to bless and improve mankind. That these advantages have derived their origin from the religion of Christ, that they have grown to maturity only in that Religion, will never be questioned by such an assembly as I have the honour to address ; it cannot be doubted by any educated mind—it is a truth resting on the nature of man, and supported by the strongest evidence of his history. Whatever can restrain the lawless passions of man, whatever can counteract his inordinate propensities, that is the parent of human happiness, that the source of human improvement. Now I affirm without fear of contradiction, that no power but the power of Religion can meet the violence of human depravity ; that no force but the force of the Gospel can save man from the passions of man. To what other hope can we recur ? Is it to law ? Law has forbidden the commission of crimes—stern, inexorable justice has pursued the criminal ; but that criminal, urged on by ungovernable passions, has despised law, and laughed to scorn the terror of human justice. For how many ages has the earth been crimsoned by the victims of un pitying law ? And has it yet affrighted that earth into virtue ? It has scarcely thinned the numbers of the guilty. The arm of violence is still uplifted. The robber still infests society. The voice of blasphemy still continues to solicit vengeance from above. The degraded human carcass still lies in your streets sleeping in the death of intoxication—these are evils which law, unsupported by Religion, has not removed ; it cannot remove them—the terrors of the sword may occasionally restrain man from the public

perpetration of crimes, but it cannot raise in his bosom the love of any virtue ; it may force man to screen his enormities under the veil of hypocrisy, but in doing so, it kills every estimable principle in his heart, and sinks him to the lowest depth of moral humiliation.

It may perhaps, be affirmed, that civilization can supply the place of Religion, and assume the guidance of human actions. The age in which we live has decided that point, and put the question to rest, I trust, for ever. It has been reserved for our days, and for our instruction, to see how civilized men can act when withdrawn from the salutary restraint and benignant influence of Religion. They have acted. The voice of unutterable confusion has echoed back their deeds. The groan of universal carnage has ascended to the throne of the Deity. They have borne fearful testimony to the value of Religion—they have raised as evidence to its necessity, monuments that never will be erased from the mind of man. The lesson was an awful one, heaven grant we may profit by it. But I do not rest on the follies or the miseries of the present day, when I assert the dependance of human happiness on Religion ; I am borne out in the truth of that assertion by history in every age, and by man in all the varieties of his condition. When we trace the cheerless map of man in those portions of the world where the voice of the Evangelist has not yet been heard, what prospect offers itself to our attention ? We see the earth covered over by countless hordes of Savages, dark, unsocial and hostile, without God, without hope, without humanity, rotting away generation after generation like the vegetables on which they feed, or the beast with whom they assort.

Passing from this humiliating view of our species, and directing our attention to those regions where the light of christianity has dawned upon man, we see him softened, humanized, enlightened, and lest any doubt should exist respecting the cause of his improvement, we discover social happiness and national prosperity, growing with the growth of Religion & declining with its fall. Thus we find those countries which first received the advantages of christianity, adorned by every virtue, improved by every art, illumined by every science ; holding on a bright and unblemished course through long succession of ages, till pride, corruption and ingratitude rendered them unworthy of the Gospel, and provoked the Almighty to withdraw its light from them. Sad reverse ! A long night of misery, ignorance and barbarity, has since overspread these devoted countries, and fallen from the high character he had borrowed from Religion, man has sunk into a state of abasement, little raised above the brute that perishes. Europe offered a refuge to the exiled remnant of eastern greatness and Religion, and Europe was amply rewarded for her hospitality. The track of the barbarian was blotted from her soil, the torch of science blazed through all her nations ; man rose and flourished in every quality that assimilates him to the Deity, in reason, in piety, in virtue. The blessings of Heaven were not merely ministered with liberality, they were scattered with profusion ; but the fountain from which these blessings flowed on the nations of Europe, has been dried up by the folly and impiety of its inhabitants. They have loaded the Gospel of Christ with dishonour. They have broken the chain that bound them to the Deity, and they have sunk the dupes and victims of a proud, shallow, presumptuous philosophy. The storm of Almighty ven-

geance has burst over their heads, but from the centre of its devastation, the angel of wisdom has proclaimed this great instruction to the world; *they who are false to their God will be traitors to their country—the bosom, which has felt the withering touch of infidelity, will not be the foremost to shield the sacred rights of society—the heart which is inspired by the genuine spirit of Christianity, will prove in the day of trial, the abode of patriotism, of honour, of every quality that enobles man.* These are not the visionary ravings of a heated fancy, they are the unanswerable deductions of experience. They are truths incorporated in the history of Europe, and written in imperishable characters on its soil. And can the diffusion of such a Religion as this among our fellow-creatures, be deemed a thing of indifference? The man that could hazard such an opinion, is neither intelligent, nor humane. He is equally a stranger to the motives that create rectitude in the human breast, and to that power which lifts man to a greatness above his nature; for these motives and that power can be found only in christianity. The general diffusion of that blessed Religion, is therefore a general benefit conferred on man; the best security for virtue, the only security for happiness; hence I re-assert that the object of this day's meeting is important, as it goes to spread that invaluable blessing through our country.

The advantages conferred on mankind by the christian dispensation cannot be fairly estimated by any partial view of that wondrous work. We adore the victim whom love conducted to Calvary. We venerate that power which could arrest the uplifted arm of God's avenging justice. We would appreciate that

blood which has appeased the wrath of Heaven, and washed away the stain of human delinquency. We bless the goodness which cheered a benighted world with the joyous tidings of its deliverance; and the business of this day, calls on us, in a special manner, to admire the provident arrangement which perpetuates to mankind the benefit of this great sacrifice, by a regular system of spiritual government, deriving its institution from Christ, and relying on the truth of his promises for the certainty of its continuance. In this matchless production of mercy and wisdom, nothing has been left to the folly of human speculation, nothing has been surrendered to the wickedness of human passion, nothing to the workings of human vanity. The constitution of this government has been formed, the combination of all its parts has been arranged by the unerring wisdom of God. Its object is specially defined, the perfection of the Saints and the edification of the body of Christ. The duties of its chief officers distinctly pointed out—to yield fearless testimony to the faith revealed by Christ; to guard with anxious solieitude and feed with wholesome doctrine the flock of their heavenly master; to maintain order, peace, and discipline, in those portions of Christ's church committed to their guidance, and to hold themselves and their people united to the first of christian Pastors, to whom appertains plenitude of Apostolical power and pre-eminent ecclesiastical jurisdiction. To this spiritual government Christ has promised a duration co-extensive with time; “*behold, I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world.*” and the lapse of eighteen centuries argues a stability which must attract the notice and fix the attention even of the unbelieving. During that period every human institution has repeatedly changed; the best establish-

ed empires have been broken up in their foundation ; governments which the folly of human wisdom had deemed almost imperishable, have passed away, and scarcely left their name with the historian ; but the spiritual government of Christ's church, has come down to us, unaltered, unbroken, unimpaired, " resting upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone."

The gradation of order and subordination of power in the christian priesthood are clearly designated in scripture, but the solemnity of this day limits my observations and your attention, to the first order of christian ministers, the successors of the Apostles. The just claim of Bishops to that rank and that succession, is warranted by every description of authority respected among christians : by scripture, by tradition, by the universal practice of the christian church, from the days of the Apostles, to those in which we live. In the acts of the Apostles, St. Paul delivers this solemn admonition to the episcopal order. " Take heed to yourselves and to the whole flock wherein the Holy Ghost hath placed you Bishops to rule the church of God." In the Epistle of St. Paul to Timothy, we find the latter after his appointment as Bishop of Ephesus, invested with all the essential attributes of Apostolical authority, empowered to command and teach those under his care, to see that no doctrine was preached but such as had been delivered by our Lord and his Apostles, to commit the office of instruction to faithful and qualified men, and to select for the sacred ministry, subjects of blameless manners, of steady faith, and approved discretion.

We find the same authority exercised in the churches of Crete by Titus, whom St. Paul had constituted

Bishop in that Island. St. Paul declares him empowered, by virtue of his appointment, to teach all degrees of men, to exhort and rebuke them with authority, to take cognizance of hereticks, and to reject from the communion of the church those among them who did not repent on a second admonition, to set in order whatever St. Paul had left wanting, and lastly to ordain Priests for the different cities. Here we see from holy writ, the highest pastoral authority exercised over certain portions of the faithful, by those to whom the Episcopal charge was committed; preaching the word, administering the sacraments, making such regulations as they deemed expedient for the spiritual advantage of their people; and this not by any vicarious commission, but by the proper independent authority of their order. But if any doubt could exist regarding this important article of christian revelation, that doubt must be removed by a reference to the opinion of those ages, when the church of Christ is generally exempted even from the imputation of error. For more than three hundred years after the death of Christ, his followers were distinguished for patience, for innocence, for sanctity and invincible fortitude: by virtues such as the world had never witnessed, they extorted praise from their inveterate enemies, and won the admiration of those whom persecution had armed for their murder: it is not to be presumed that men of this description who yielded up their lives as an offering to truth, who clung to the Gospel under the pressure of torture, and proclaimed their faith from the agonizing rack; it is not to be presumed that men of this description would give their name and sanction to an institution which if not divine must not only affect the interest but involve the destruction of that truth, for which they

gladly surrendered every hope and advantage within the gift of this world. Yet we find the Episcopal order perfectly understood in these ages and by these men : we find the full extent of its authority clearly ascertained and universally admitted ; and we find obedience to that authority exacted as an indispensable article of christian communion, and a duty essentially connected with the hope of future blessedness.

St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, lived in the days of the Apostles. Some short time previous to his martyrdom, he addressed letters to the principal churches of Asia Minor. To the church of Ephesus he writes thus —“ when I was with you, I cried out and spoke with a loud voice, adhere to the Bishop, to the college of Presbyters, and the Deacons,” and he calls Christ to witness for whose sake he was in bonds, that the holy spirit proclaimed these words to him, “ do nothing without the Bishop.” In his letter to the Magnesians, he exhorts them “ to do all things in Godly peace and concord, their Bishops presiding in the place of God, the priests as the council of Apostles and the Deacons as the ministers of Christ.” In his Epistle to the church of Smyrna, he says, “ let no man do any thing which concerns the church without the Bishop, let that Eucharist be accounted valid which is ordered by the Bishop or one whom he appoints.” St. Ireneus, who was a cotemporary of Ignatius, makes the succession of Bishops in a direct line from the Apostles, an argument against the Hereticks of his day. “ We can reckon up those whom the Apostles ordained to be Bishops in the several churches, and who they were that succeeded them, down to our own times ; and had the Apostles known any hidden mysteries which they imparted to none but the prefect (as the Hereticks pre-

tend) they would have committed them to those men, to whom they committed the churches themselves: for, they desired to have those in all things perfect whom they left to be their successors, and to whom they committed their own Apostolical authority."

St. Clement of Alexandria, the most learned man of that age, mentions the three distinct orders of Bishops, Priests and Deacons, and specifies the obligations peculiar to each. Thus we see, in the first age, the christian hierarchy, perfectly understood, and the Bishops acknowledged and obeyed as the successors of the Apostles both in name and authority. Tertullian in the second age after the Apostles mentions the universal establishment of Bishops, decending in a direct line from the Apostles: and in his treatise on Baptism, he asserts their superior power in these words—"the power of Baptising is lodged in the Bishops, it may also be exercised by Priests and Deacons, but not without the Bishops commission." Origen, after calling the attention of the faithful to the just claims of Deacons and Presbyters, says, "there is another debt to Bishops, which is the greatest of all, and exacted by the saviour of the whole church, who will severely punish the non-payment of it." St. Cyprian, who lived in the same age, arguing against Novatian, assumes it as an unquestionable fact, that their being only one church, and one Episcopacy all the world over, and orthodox and pious Bishops being already regularly ordained through all the provinces of the Roman Empire, he must be a schismatic who laboured to set up false Bishops in opposition to them." In another place he asserts that there can be no second Bishop in the same church. In a letter to the Presbyters of his church, he maintains his own superior au-

authority, and thus severely rebukes some of them, who had exceeded the limits of their jurisdiction, " who neither mindful of the Gospel, nor of their own station, neither regarding the judgment of God, nor the Bishop who now presides over them, dare arrogate to themselves what was never attempted under any of my predecessors. I shall conclude by adducing the authority of Eusebius, Bishop of Cesarea.—This distinguished writer directed the resources of a great mind and almost boundless erudition, in following the progress of christianity down to his own time. To the indefatigable labour and enlightened researches of this learned man, we are indebted for a minute acquaintance with the history of christianity from the commencement of Christ's public ministry to the year three hundred and twenty three. The guide that led him through the darkness and confusion of three hundred years of terror and persecution, was the unbroken chain of Episcopal succession. In the second book of his ecclesiastical history, he thus mentions the church of Alexandria. " In the 8th year of the reign of Nero, Annianus, a man acceptable to God, undertook the government of the church of Alexandria, first after Mark, the Evangelist;" he then mentions the Bishops who to his time succeeded to the administration of that church. In his third book he enumerates the Bishops who filled the see of Antioch from Evodius, who was first after the Apostle Peter, to Theophilus. In his fourth book he records the names of the Bishops of Jerusalem beginning with James the Apostle. It is unnecessary to detain you by any further reference to the sense of primitive christianity, on this important article of Catholic faith. You have seen that in those days of glorious sufferings and splendid sanctity, the christian world

considered as *we do*, the Bishops, as the successors of the Apostles, and recognized in them the plenitude of the priestly powers. The names I have adduced in proof of this uniform doctrine of the Catholic church, are among the most illustrious both for learning and sanctity, that the christian annals can boast. Some of these witnesses were personally instructed by the Apostles, and all of them, like the Apostles, set their own lives and this world at nought, when weighed against the truth revealed by their sinless master.

To this place of pastoral eminence, of distinguished honor, and most awful responsibility, you, very reverend Father, have been selected by your superiors and separated by the spirit of God, for the highest work of the Ministry. To your guidance is committed a portion of that flock which Christ purchased on Calvary; and never was that commission given at a period more eventful, and in circumstances more truly interesting. By your testimony to the faith of the Catholic Church they are henceforward to abide; from you, they are to receive the food of wholesome doctrine, the saving evidence of a blameless example.—The duty you are called to, is arduous, but the remuneration you are promised is splendid; your path is strewn with difficulties, your office is beset with perils, but at the finishing of your course, the Prince of Pastors has pledged his eternal truth that he will reward your faithful services with a diadem of unfading glory. When we consider the inestimable worth of the human soul, the glorious purpose for which it was called into existence, the nameless variety of causes which threaten to defeat that end, we cannot feel surprised at the exalted qualifications required in him to whom the guardianship of that soul is committed,

We cannot affect astonishment when we learn that the good shepherd is one who despises every danger, who braves every difficulty, who suppresses every feeling, who stands prepared to devote life itself for the safety of his flock. The virtues that in common men might fairly challenge our applause and justify our hopes, move far below the perfection required in a Bishop—his worth must be commensurate with his dignity—his life must be heavenly as his office—his heart must answer this solemn appeal which Christ three times repeated to the first of his Apostles ; “ Simon son of John, lovest thou me more than these :” And as he values the imperishable crown which awaits him, he will give evidence of that superior love required by Christ, not in vain, empty, inoperative professions of attachment, but in real, living, indubitable proofs of love ; in imparting safety and support to that cherished flock, which our adored Redeemer prized above his life. A Bishop must not only feel in his heart that love which is strong as death, but he must aspire to that abundant charity, which alone can smooth the rough road of Pastoral care, and lighten the oppressive burthen of Pastoral solicitude. He must seek with indefatigable perseverance the salvation of souls, but science must enlighten, and discretion must guide the impulse of his zeal. When I speak of the science of a Bishop, I do not mean the chilling noxious vapour of mere human learning, which engenders pride, and points the way to ruin—his must be the science of salvation, the knowledge of God, created, improved and made perfect by the Gospel. When I call for discretion as a quality necessary to his office, I do not mean the timid, timeserving thing which the world knows by that name, that worthless prudence which bends the venerable form of Religion, to promote the

the wretched speculations of selfishness, *his* must be that discretion which originates in the fear of the Lord, and renders all passing things justly subservient to man's more lasting and more glorious destination.

Placed on an eminence, "held up as a spectacle to the world, to Angels and to men"; the conduct of a Bishop can never be a matter of indifference; his deportment is measured; his every word is marked; the eye of a world that never pardons, is fixed upon him; to him no middle course is granted; the opinion of mankind coincides in this instance with the spirit of the Gospel; if he does not build up, he destroys; if his life breathe not the odour of edification, if his actions do not carry glory to the Father who is in Heaven, he dishonours his place, he betrays his trust, he breaks his allegiance to the Prince of Pastors, Christ Jesus our Lord. To the Episcopal office it peculiarly belongs to minister to the spiritual wants of mankind the word of eternal life, and point out to their people the narrow path that leads to blessedness; hence they are styled in the Gospel, "the light of the world"; but if that light be obscured by passion, or hidden under the mantle of indolence and sloth, what hand will conduct the unhappy flock to safety? What power can lure them from the wide and perilous road of reprobation and misery? The flock may perish, but the faithless shepherd shall perish with them: the blood by which they were redeemed may be made void, but let it be remembered, "that blood cries louder than the blood of Abel."

It is therefore of indispensable necessity that a Bishop impart to his flock the word of eternal life. But it is yet more important that he support the authority

of his instruction by a blameless sanctity of manners, and an unimpeachable integrity of life. The fire of heavenly charity must glow in his words, and be visible in his actions: for, if the world can contrast the life of a Bishop with his doctrine, from that moment he has lost the power to save. His discourses may sparkle with eloquence and abound with erudition, but they will fall from his lips, cold, fruitless and lifeless. They may amuse the imagination, they cannot reform the heart. Instead of encouraging the growth of virtue and co-operating with heaven to save the immortal soul, he kills every feeling of good, he confirms the doubts of the unbelieving, and hardens the obduracy of the impenitent. Instead of evincing a shepherd's tenderness, in rescuing his hapless flock from danger, his example encourages their disastrous wanderings, and strengthens the chain of moral death by which they are bound. Heaven will shield the Church of America from such a misfortune as this. Her Bishops will labour to deserve the encomium which the Martyr Cyprian bestowed on Pope Cornelius; "whilst you advance to glory," said that illustrious man, "you attract companions to your victory, and induce your people to confess their faith by seeing you prepared to confess for all." Very reverend Fathers! You have not to resort to antiquity for an example of Episcopal virtue. That bounteous God, whose manifold blessings overspread this land, whose boundless mercies claim our warmest gratitude, still preserves for your advantage, a living encouragement to such virtue and a fair model for your imitation. You will seek both in your venerable and most reverend Prelate—you will find both in the father of the American Church, and under God the author of its prosperity. In him you will find that meekness which is the best fruit of the

Holy Ghost, that humility which, for Christ's sake, makes him the servant of all; that richly polished character which none but great minds can receive, which nothing but virtue can impart. Fathers! You are called to a great work, a treasure of countless value is deposited in your hands; even the eternal hope of your people. Your place henceforward is between them and their offended maker. You are to avert his vengeance, to implore his pardon. You must call down mercy and reconciliation from Heaven. The first of your prayers will be for the everlasting salvation of mankind, let your second and last invoke blessings on this dear country. May this land which providence has prepared for the day of the world's distress—this last refuge for the broken spirit of man, never feel the arm of grinding oppression; may the foul fiend of intolerance never cast her dark and baleful shade upon it; may liberty and religion hold it up to the admiration of mankind to the last day of the world. Grant this, thou God of mercy, through thy dear Son, and our adored Saviour Christ Jesus.—Amen.

FINIS.





NOV 13 1959

